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REMARKS

Claims 1-18 were previously pending, and claims 19-23 have been added. Claims 1-23 are presently pending. An early indication of allowance is respectfully requested. A marked-up version of the amendments have been attached pursuant to CFR § 1.121.

Objections To The Drawings

The Examiner has objected to the drawings for having a reference numeral, specifically reference numeral 256 (Fig. 7), that is not mentioned in the written description. Applicants direct the Examiner's attention to pg. 29, lines 16-17 of the written description as originally filed where that reference numeral and corresponding method step is described. Applicants respectfully request that this objection be removed.

Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. § 102

Claims 1-4, 9, and 13-17 stand rejected as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 6,014,650 to Zampese. This rejection is respectfully traversed. It is noted that Figs. 1 and 2 of Zampese do not conform to the written specification of Zampese, and further reference will be made only to the Zampese written specification.

Zampese describes a purchase management system (PMS) for an e-commerce merchant. A purchaser is provided with an ordered series of secret transaction codes in addition to an account identifier. (col. 2, lines 1-3). Each of the series of transactions codes is only used once, and must be used in a predefined order. (col. 5, lines 3-10). This is "different from assigning a single personal identification number (PIN) or password." (col. 4, lines 53-56). The account maintained at the PMS can be described as a debit account, in that it includes a deposit amount provided by the user, and once the deposit amount has been depleted, no more transactions can occur. (col. 5, lines 15-25).

Claim 1 recites "a system for authorizing a credit transaction between a customer and an e-commerce merchant." The system includes "means for identifying rights to use a charge account identified by a first account number", as well as other items. This is the opposite of the system taught by Zampese - which teaches away from using a charge account for a credit

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transaction. In fact, Zampese attempts to provide an alternative to credit cards because "it is relatively easy for unauthorized people to steal the purchaser's credit card number and then make unauthorized purchases." (col. 1, lines 28-30).

Claim 13 recites "a method for authorizing transactions" including "establishing a signature phrase for being used in a plurality of transactions." The signature phrase can be used so that "the customer can authorize transactions made on the account using the signature phrase." This is opposite of the system taught by Zampese. Specifically, Zampese teaches that the use of an ordered series of secret transaction codes is "different from assigning a single personal identification number (PIN) or password." (col. 4, lines 53-56).

Claim 16 recites "a method for authorizing a transaction between a customer having an account number and an e-commerce merchant" including "allowing the customer to create an alternate means of confirming rights in the account, including establishing a plurality of signature phrases linked to the account number; and authorizing a transaction authorization request for the account by linking any one of the plurality of signature phrases to the account number." This, in effect, allows multiple people or entities to authorize a purchase on the account. Although Zampese teaches an ordered series of secret transaction codes, only one of the transaction codes can ever be used at any one time. As such, Zampese makes it virtually impossible for multiple people or entities to authorize a purchase on the account.

Claim 17 has been amended to correct an antecedent basis problem. Claim 17 recites "a method for authorizing a transaction between a customer and an e-commerce merchant, the customer having an account number and an associated activation code that can be used to confirm rights in an account identified by the account number." The account number is further linked to a signature phrase. For a transaction, the customer submits an account number and the signature phrase so that the signature phrase can be used to authorize the transaction. In this way, the associated activation code does not have to be transmitted at any time during the transaction. This is contrasted with the Examiner's attempt to equate Zampese's account code as the combination of the claimed account number and activation code. (See office action at page 3).

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Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. § 103

Claims 5-8, 10-12 and 18 stand rejected as being obvious in light of Zampese and either U.S. Patent No. 6,233,565 to Lewis et al., U.S. Patent No. 5,909,492 to Payne et al., or U.S. Patent No. 6,029,141 to Bezos et al. This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Claim 11 recites a system "wherein the authorization form includes a customer-specific indicator previously provided by the customer to the database, the customer-specific indicator being independent of the merchant." The example in the patent specification of the customer-specific indicator was the phrase "How About Those Dallas Cowboys" shown in Fig. 8. As discussed in the patent specification, this provides assurance to the customer that he/she is communicating with the appropriate entity (e.g., Central Airlines Visa). (See patent application at pg. 30, lines 5-15).

The Examiner has stated that "Although Bezos et al. do not expressly disclose the authorization form including a greeting phrase previously provided by the customer to the database. The greeting phrase being displayed on the authorization form does not patentably distinguish the claimed system." (Office Action at pg. 8). Referring to Fig. 10c of Bezos et al., the window illustrated therein shows nothing that would provide the customer any assurance that he/she is communicating with anyone other than the merchant (Amazon.com in this example). For merchants less famous than Amazon.com, many customers may be reluctant to provide their signature phrase, and the transaction may not be completed. Thus, the system of claim 11 provides a unique and patentably distinct improvement over the prior art.

Claim 12 further recites that the authorization form includes a logo identifying the merchant. Seeing a combination of both the authorizing entity (Central Airlines Visa) and the merchant (Bookstore Website) can be very comforting to customers, so that they are more likely to perceive that they are dealing with a legitimate and reputable merchant.

Claim 18 recites "an apparatus for authorizing transactions between a customer and an e-commerce merchant" including "an engine operable to receive a plurality of authorization requests from the merchant, process the requests including verifying rights in an account associated with the account number by the customer using a single signature phrase, and return an authorization form if the signature phrase is linked to the account number." This is opposite of the system taught by Zampese. Specifically, Zampese teaches that the use of an ordered series

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of secret transaction codes is "different from assigning a single personal identification number (PIN) or password." (col. 4, lines 53-56). By using a signature phrase for a plurality of transactions, the present invention is more akin to normal credit card procedures.

Each of the remaining pending claims are patentable over the prior art for additional reasons clearly evident. Furthermore, the dependent claims further limit their respective independent claims and are therefore allowable as well.

Conclusion
An early formal notice of allowance of claims 1-23 is requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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Redlined Version of Claim Amendments

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1.   (Amended) A system for authorizing a credit transaction between a customer and an e-commerce merchant, the system comprising:

means for identifying rights to use [an] a charge account identified by a first account number;

a database for storing the first account number, and for receiving and storing a first signature phrase responsive to a positive identification of rights to use the charge account;

an interface for receiving a second account number and a second signature phrase from the customer; and

a comparator for comparing the first and second account numbers and the first and second signature phrases;

whereby the system authorizes the credit transaction upon a successful comparison of the first and second account numbers and the first and second signature phrases.

6.   (Amended) The system of claim [1] 10 wherein the authorization form includes a transformation system to transform the signature phrase at the customer, and wherein the interface receives the second account number and the second signature phrase in a transformed format.

11.   (Amended) The system of claim 10 wherein the authorization form includes a [greeting phrase] customer-specific indicator previously provided by the customer to the database, the customer-specific indicator being independent of the merchant.

13.   (Amended) A method for authorizing [a transaction] transactions between a customer that is authorized to use an account and an e-commerce merchant, the method comprising:

confirming rights in the account by associating an account code with an account number associated with the account;

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establishing a signature phrase for being used in a plurality of transactions;

linking the signature phrase to the account number for use in the [transaction] transactions; and

extending rights to the account, normally only associated with the account code, to the signature phrase such that the customer can authorize [the transaction] transactions made on the account using the signature phrase.

16.   (Amended) A method for authorizing a transaction between a customer having an account number and an e-commerce merchant, the method comprising:

linking an account code to the account number to enable the customer to confirm rights to an account identified by the account number;

having confirmed rights to the account, allowing the customer to create an alternate means of confirming rights in the account, including establishing a plurality of signature [phrase] phrases linked to the account number; and

authorizing a transaction authorization request for the account by linking any one of the plurality of signature [phrase] phrases to the account number.

17.   (Amended) A method for authorizing a transaction between a customer and an e-commerce merchant, the customer having an account number and an associated activation code that can be used to confirm rights in an account identified by the account number, the method comprising:

once rights in the account are confirmed, linking the account number to a signature phrase;

receiving a transaction authorization request from the merchant including an account [identifier] number and the signature phrase;

verifying the signature phrase is linked to the account number indicated by the account indicator; and

authorizing the transaction if the signature phrase is linked to the account number.

18.   (Amended) An apparatus for authorizing transactions between a customer and an

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e-commerce merchant, comprising

a database including a list of linked account numbers and signature phrases; [and]

an engine operable to receive a plurality of authorization requests from the merchant, process the requests including verifying rights in an account associated with the account number by the customer using a single signature phrase, and return an authorization form if the signature phrase is linked to the account number; and

a network interface for selectively connecting to a plurality of different e-commerce merchants and a plurality of different customers.

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